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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1607
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1631
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SUBJECT: CASE INVOLVING SRI LANKAN MIGRANTS SUCCESSFULLY
RESOLVED

REF: JAKARTA 01895 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified -- Please handle accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: A month-long asylum-related stand-off came to end on November 16 when 56 Sri Lankan migrants agreed to leave a ship moored near an island off of Sumatra. The migrants will now be processed by UNHCR, and will be on their way to Australia if the GOA and UNHCR judge them to be genuine refugees. In the meantime, 250 Sri Lankans remain on a cargo ship in western Java. The case of the 250 migrants has been turned over to the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is working to resolve the situation. The GOI continues to work flexibly and within international norms to handle the up-tick in irregular migrants intercepted as they head toward Australia. END SUMMARY.

STAND-OFF COMES TO AN END

¶3. (U) There is good news regarding a migrant-related case in Indonesia. A month long stand-off involving 56 Sri Lankan asylum seekers and the GOI came to an end on November 16 when the migrants agreed to disembark from a vessel. They will join 22 compatriots who left the ship--which is moored off of Bintan Island near Sumatra--on November 13. The UNHCR, in coordination with the Indonesian and Australian governments, will expeditiously process claims for asylum and, if they so merit, the GOA will accept the migrants as refugees.

SRI LANKANS REMAIN IN WESTERN JAVA

¶4. (SBU) Another tranche of Sri Lankan migrants remains in limbo. On November 16, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Deplu) replaced immigration authorities as the agency in charge of handling the case of the 250 Sri Lankans who have been moored off of the coast of West Java for more than a month. The asylum seekers are demanding to be taken to Australia and have refused to leave their boat. However, in line with well-established procedures, the group must first turn themselves over to Indonesian immigration officials, who will then identify them. Pending the result of the investigation immigration will turn their cases over to the UNHCR. The UNHCR will then determine whether they qualify for refugee status. The seven irregular migrants who left the boat nearly a month ago are currently being held in a detention center waiting for the UNHCR to rule on their applications for asylum.

¶5. (SBU) Despite various press reports, International

Organization for Migration (IOM) representatives say that they continue to work on the case of the 250 migrants. IOM says it has representatives stationed near the boat. IOM has noted that it has concerns that some of the migrants on the boat are irascible and difficult to deal with. Nonetheless, the organization is committed to working with the GOI, GOA, and UNHCR on their cases.

GOI WORKS FLEXIBLY AND WITHIN INTERNATIONAL NORMS

16. (SBU) The GOI continues to act per international norms and regulations. Indonesian officials are working full-time to resolve the cases, and, in doing this, they are in close touch with Australia, Sri Lanka, and international organizations. As reported, there has been an up-tick in the number of irregular migrants on their way to Australia intercepted by the GOI this year. This situation is overtaxing the capacity of the GOI and localities to deal with it. Mission is in touch with the GOI, urging it to continue down the constructive path it has chosen.

HUME